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Surviving Monolingualism: Embracing Translingual Perspectives
and Trans-semiotizing

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in
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Abstract

This thesis is an attempt to contribute to the deconstruction of the monolingual myth that has dominated language attitudes and the language classroom in the U.S. for centuries. Its main proposition is that by promoting and advocating for translanguaging and trans-semiotizing in the classroom and in daily life, we can affirm the linguistic and cultural identities of students, individuals, and groups that are marginalized or oppressed by hegemonic monolingual ideologies and improve our language teaching practices. Through literature review and personal narrative, the author has endeavored to demonstrate how translanguaging offers potential solutions to some current linguistic conflicts and how monolingualism undervalues all language users, no matter the number of languages spoken. The author contends that all speakers practice translanguaging and trans-semiotizing when making meaning dialogically. Suggestions are then offered for what educators and individuals can do in the classroom and in their personal lives to incorporate and more fully embrace translingual practices and thus begin to change the linguistic narrative.

Educational Resources Information Center Descriptors

Applied Linguistics

Bilingualism

Language Attitudes

Language Dominance

Plurilingualism

Multilingualism

Contents

Introduction	6
Sacred Deficiency: The American Myth of Monolingualism	10
Translingual Practices for the Classroom and Daily Life.....	23
Questions for Further Research:	35
References	35



How do you feel when you hear a foreign language spoken in public? Over a third of Americans feel uncomfortable or even outright offended when they hear a “foreign” language being spoken in public. This number increases to over half when only white Republicans were asked this same question (PEW-Horowitz, 2019). We see people being accosted for speaking in Spanish in stores and on the street. We hear people saying, “Wow! Your English is great!” to Asian-Americans who were born here and only speak English. We read signs that say, “Speak English!” pointed at immigrants and non-English speakers. If we look at the numbers of languages spoken throughout the history of the U.S., we find that the country is not monolingual at all. In the U.S. there are currently more Spanish speakers than in Spain (about 53 million). At the time of the American Revolution nearly a third of all people living in the colonies spoke a language other than English (Rumbaut and Massey, 2013). The U.S. has always been a multilingual nation.

If this is true, then why is there this level of animosity towards non-English languages in the U.S. and other countries in the Anglosphere? Why do many Americans feel so offended when other languages enter their eardrums? Why do so many assume that one country equals one language?

Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries the colonial powers of Europe strove to nationalize and unify their citizens through processes such as the standardization of language and culture. Several prominent thinkers proposed that every people (*Volk*) had its own character and, therefore, language (especially German thinkers like Herder and later Hegel). Combined with the pseudoscientific race theories that were rising around Europe and the Americas, the idea of linguistic purity became entwined with nationhood. The bureaucratic apparatuses then began to standardize and to curricularize (Valdes, 2020) the language of the elites in each nation. Indeed, prior to this process there existed language/dialect continuums that stretched across Europe and most of the world, (as is still the case in some places today) (Canagarajah 2013, Gramling 2018). The monolithic languages we study and learn today are but a single instance of a certain piece of a dialect continuum that was spoken by those in power. Spanish (*Castellano*) is specific to the Castille region in Spain, German (*Hochdeutsch*) is a conglomerate of northern German dialects spoken by the literary elite, and English has London and (arguably) Hollywood as its centers of language power.

The process of monolingualization (or Americanization) had dire consequences for those who spoke different or non-standard languages. Native American children were rounded up by the U.S. government and put into “Native American boarding schools” to be stripped of their native languages and cultures. African Americans who spoke (and continue to speak) AAVE (African American Vernacular English) have been barred from jobs, housing, and education, cast

into poverty and indentured servitude. German Americans were forced to stop speaking German out of fear of using the “enemy’s” language during both world wars. Even English speakers of “non-standard” varieties have been ridiculed and excluded from economic opportunity and social mobility. This discrimination has been especially prominent in our education system, which penalizes and dehumanizes non-English and non-standard speakers alike (Glenn and de Jong, 1996).

Until the Great War broke out in 1914, the U.S. had massive waves of European immigrants. According to the 1910 census, about 15% of Americans spoke a language other than English. Bilingual parochial schools proliferated throughout the country and immigrant groups (especially Catholics) each had their own newspapers and cultural communities that they promulgated. Several states began offering bilingual (French, German, and Spanish) public school classes in the late 19th century in order to compete with the success of the parochial schools, but were short-lived when, in 1911, states began requiring all instruction be given in English only. What we today call ELL (English Language Learners (or ESL, English as Second Language) students were put into segregated classrooms where teachers would extol civic virtues and citizenship in English, leading many of these students to leave school. Immigration declined to extremely low levels due to restrictions by the U.S. government and the “America First” isolationist attitude that pervaded the country and did not increase again until the 1970’s (Glenn and de Jong, 1996). Since then, ELL students have struggled in our education systems and currently have a much higher dropout rate than their native English counterparts (19% higher according to the 2015-16 DOE EL Report Card!). ELL students have been left to fall through the cracks in our classrooms and until very recently bi/multilingualism was belittled and derided as detrimental and even potentially dangerous to students’ development.

In the last few decades scholars and educators have begun to move us into a post-national and translingual theoretical space (Makoni and Pennycook, 2007; Blackledge and Creese, 2010; Canagarajah, 2013; García and Wei, 2014; May, 2014; Wei, 2017; Larson-Freeman, 2017 etc.). Just as the theory of race has been undone by modern science, so too is the myth of monolingualism being disinvented (Makoni and Pennycook, 2007). Indeed, the very concept of “lingualism” itself is being questioned. In what Stephen May and others have termed “The Multilingual Turn”, scholars and educators are laying the theoretical groundwork for a cultural transformation in our classrooms and in our streets (May, 2014). Scholars and educators started to notice that monolingual instruction of ELLs was not only dysfunctional, but also dehumanizing as it sought to strip students of their linguistic and cultural identities and replace them with an Anglo-American one. What scholars call translanguaging (or *heteroglossia*, plurilingualism, additive bilingualism, etc.) has been proposed as an important framework to replace the monolingual one. Through a multidisciplinary approach which includes personal language narratives, numerous studies of bi/multilingual learners, and theory craft, scholars and educators have begun the herculean task of challenging and upending the monolingual myth (Canagarajah, 2013; Marschall and Moore, 2018; Wei and Angel, 2019; García and Otheguy, 2020) .

I endeavor to use a similar interdisciplinary approach in this paper to demonstrate how I have come to incorporate translingual concepts into my personal and professional life and how, in turn, other educators can incorporate them to begin to shift the culture of our classrooms and thence, our communities. I will likewise look at the monolingual myth and, using the same interdisciplinary approach, attempt to add my own critique which I call the “sacred deficiency” at the heart of American monolingual culture. Some of my main guiding questions are: What is

meant by monolingualism? Do monolinguals and multilinguals navigate “contact zones” (Pratt, 1991) differently? How are individuals’ identities valued when translanguaging is used as the main framework for instruction? What techniques and methods can educators use in and outside of the classroom to promulgate a translingual culture?

Sacred Deficiency: The American Myth of Monolingualism



What do we mean by monolingualism?

Mono- Greek origin- alone, solitary

Lingua- Latin origin- tongue, language

-ism- Greek origin- suffix denoting a practice, idea, ideology, or philosophy

Monolingual- a person who speaks *only* one language. (OED, author’s italics)

Only- alone, no other or others than; in but one manner; for but one purpose (OED)

Monolingualism- a system or ideology which promulgates and promotes the use and learning of only one language, to the exclusion of others. (author’s definition)

From the brief etymological data above, and the definition of monolingualism, we can see that the word monolingualism itself is composed of morphemes originating from two different languages - Latin and Greek. Part of the irony of being a monolingual English speaker is that a considerable amount of units in the English lexicon consists of words of varied and mixed origins. Indeed, English can count Celtic, Old Norse, Frisian, Norman French, Greek, Latin, and many more contributors to its lexicon and grammatical development. What we derive from this observation is that English has had a very cosmopolitan history with several waves of languages interacting with it and influencing it. Why then, despite the previous observation, do many monolingual English speakers denounce foreigners as ruining our language? Language is as much a marker of social status as it is a tool for communication. It marks our gender, socio-economic class, age, ethnicity, and language background, among other things. Seemingly small variations in speech can have very different receptions based on the audience of said speech. For example, if, when speaking, I drop the “g” on the –ing ending of a word, I will immediately be interpreted as speaking informally and, perhaps by some prescriptivists among us, as uneducated. From such variations, we interpret, judge, and include/exclude others. How we decide who is “in” or “out” of our social, economic, ethnical, or even family groups depends in many ways on these linguistic judgments (Meyerhoff, 2006).

In the same way, monolingualists (those who think we should only speak one language) decry foreign languages on our streets and in our classrooms. They have controlled our language policy discourse for over a century and have defined how we view immigrants and non-English languages. They have also created a systematic feeling that native English-speaking Americans are deficient at speaking their own language, what some have called de-competencing (Gramling, 2018). Since the beginning of English standardization, attempts have been made by

grammarians (such as Charles Butler and James Howell in the 17th century) to tell us what proper English is. As Alastair Pennycook points out, “the construction of standard English was a project that produced a set of beliefs about the supposed objects enshrined in dictionaries, grammars, and style manuals; it did not produce a ‘real thing’ called ‘standard English’ (Pennycook 2007, p.97). Grammatical prescriptions such as “you can’t end a sentence with a preposition” and “English doesn’t allow double negatives” were created to make English more like a proper language, such as Latin or Greek. Later this was further systematized and curricularized in grammar books. However, we often use such “incorrect” expressions in everyday speech. For example, if I say “I don’t see nothing”, everyone understands the meaning I want to convey. In fact, we hear these phrases every day in our mass media consumption. Is anyone really going to say, “With whom are you going out tonight?”. Not anyone with friends. What this de-competencing does is create a feeling of linguistic insecurity in the American people.

This insecurity intensifies when Americans are asked about foreign language learning. According to Marty Abbot (executive director of ACTFL), “I think Americans have a mindset that, as a country, we’re not good at languages, that they’re tough, they’re challenging, that maybe only academically gifted students can do it. And that’s a false idea, because we were able to learn our first language. Most of the rest of the world grows up bilingually, with the knowledge of more than one language. It just hasn’t been our normal in the United States.” (Abbot, 2018). Given the above cited statistics about Americans discomfort at hearing foreign languages, it is no wonder that there is such antipathy towards foreign language learning and promotion in the U.S. In my own context I hear things from students and colleagues like “How can I learn another language? I can’t even speak English correctly!”. These monolingual Americans I know are scared to even try to learn another language because they have been told their whole lives that

they cannot even speak their own native language correctly and fear ridicule by others for learning something “foreign”. In the average English classrooms that I observe every day, I witness teachers correcting students’ grammar and “teaching” them correct pronunciation, vocabulary, etc. without explaining or acknowledging the student's own linguistic abilities they come with. This is most likely due to the fact that the teachers have also been indoctrinated to believe that there is a “correct” way to use the English language. This is what Valdés refers to as language *curricularization* (Valdés, 2020). If, as language educators, we acknowledged the linguistic talents and realities that are students come from, we could then alleviate a lot of tension that exists in our schools and communities. While I do think that we need a common set of linguistic standards for mass communication, to tell students that the English they speak every day at home and with their friends and family is incorrect is just as harmful as telling our bi/multilingual students that they are deficient.

The ideological concept of language standardization and monolingualism goes back to the early concepts of the nation-state and the idea of language/culture/physical location being somehow permanent and sacred (popularized by thinkers such as Herder). Such ideologies can lead to dangerous ideas and policies similar to what the Nazis shouted at their rallies - “*Ein Volk! Ein Reich! Ein Führer*” (One people! One country! One Leader!). Almost all major “developed” countries have had some sort of top-down language standardization and/or “purification”. The origins of monolingualism in the U.S. lay in the process of Americanization that began to intensify with the outbreak of the First World War. While all immigrant and minority groups had had their turn being oppressed by the WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) communities and their political extensions such as the No-Nothings, it was not until this era that foreign languages began to be viewed as a sign of enemy support or collaboration. Prior to the war there were

hundreds of papers and periodicals published in German all around the U.S. It was the second most spoken language of the era as Germans comprised the largest immigrant group. Under the guise of keeping German spies out of the U.S., the government passed the Trading with the Enemy Act in June of 1917, which suppressed the foreign language press and forbid non-English materials from being mailed without an official translation accompanying it. Several states outlawed the speaking of German in all public places and even on the telephone. Foreign language programs in U.S. plummeted and people everywhere gave up their native language in favor of English-only as a badge of patriotism (Baron, 2014). As the war dragged on and nationalism rose to a frenzy, populist isolationist movements gained popularity causing Congress to pass the immigration act in 1924 which severely cut the number of immigrants from non-Anglophone countries to enter the U.S. (though this was also a culmination of anti-immigrant policy which began with the Chinese exclusion act among others). Mass immigration wasn't opened up again until the 1960's, creating the idea that the U.S. was being invaded by foreign speaking immigrants who were sullyng our great nation along with its language, English. Sentiments arose then, as they continue now, that English is in danger and we must push back against these foreigners who threaten our language/nation/flag. Hence, we wear our monolingualism with pride and often denigrate other languages and cultures to show our patriotism. We feel like we are doing our duty to our nation when we eschew other languages in favor of English. This is why our language deficiency has become sacred and why many think that national unity and purity are tied to linguistic purity.

The truth is that "correct" language is an ideological concept and not a lived reality. Yes, we need to speak well enough and know enough of the norms to be intelligible, but this idea of "perfect" language is not, nor has ever been, a reality. Instead of speech communities with neat,

sharp lines (English in U.S., French in France, etc.), we have what Pratt (1991) and others describe as *Contact Zones* (also Canagarajah 2013, p. 29-30). Contact zones are not physical boundaries or borders, but “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power...” (Pratt 1991, p. 34). Contact zones can cover a wide variety of social and cultural factors including language. Pratt has also contrasted contact zones with what is called ‘speech communities’ by more traditional, monolingual linguists. “this abstract idea of the speech community seemed to reflect, among other things, the Utopian way modern nations conceive of themselves...” (Pratt 1991, 37). There does not exist a place on planet Earth where people are neatly organized into speech communities with defined borders and separate distinct languages. Instead, we have contact zones with different languages, dialects, and cultures living in, around, and on top on each other. Even countries that are supposedly highly homogeneous in language and culture, like Japan or Bulgaria, have high degrees of linguistic variation when looked at closely (NINJAL; Todeva, E. 2020). Any tourist in a modern city will experience this in a visceral manner, as there is often an explosion of language one encounters on the streets. Ironically, the greatest examples of contact zones are cities in the most monolingual countries in the world, New York and London. But one doesn’t need to go to the big city to find examples of different contact zones. Every region, state, and city/town has contact zones. The factors are different in each zone, but the fact that they are negotiated daily by everyone involved remains (especially with the advent of the internet). This includes my own life.

The contact zones which I see in my context are those of the socio-economic variety. Some things I hear daily from students who come from the local working-class culture are things like: “I ain’t done nothin’ wrong!”, “Me and him are gonna go up an’ get ourselves a drink.”, and

“Yesterday, he come up to me and he says...”. Since I grew up in this class, these phrases are familiar to me, but to the educated middle-class majority of the teachers and some students, these phrases and grammatical errors are nails on a chalkboard. Teachers often make fun of and reprimand these students for their “bad English”, despite it being their natural language and it being perfectly intelligible. As expected, these working-class students rebel, turn mean, and become even more insular which harms their academic performance and puts further strains on the already strained socio-economic situation. However, an interesting observation I have made is that some of these students unconsciously begin to code-switch in the classroom. That is, they use “proper” grammar and “correct” syntax when in the presence of teachers and students from the middle-class in order to survive and advance in the classroom. I have also witness middle-class students code-switching to the nonstandard grammar and syntax to fit in with working class friend groups. Code-switching has conventionally been linked with switching between languages and is antithetical to the translingual framework, but I think a broader definition of code-switching could be employed to explain such situations of intralingual switching between varieties of English or other languages (MacSwan, 2020).

I also observe this intralinguistic switching phenomena within myself. When I am at work as a teacher or with educated people I speak what we might call Standard American English (or at least the New England version of it with certain vowel mergers) and when I am with family and friends who come from the working-class I switch to a Vermont/New Hampshire variety of English. My i’s become longer, my r’s become harder or drop, and my grammar would make any English teacher cry. My vocabulary and phraseology changes. My identity and values change to be closer in line with the group. Even my voice becomes lower as to reflect how a “man” should speak. Because the perfect tense is used less in my native variety,

I use and hear “incorrect” forms like: “Have you ever drunken?”, “Have you boughten?” and “Have you gaven?”. I have even heard myself say once, “When I was little I weared shorts every day.” These are all features that we associate with code-meshing and with many translingual practices described by Canagarajah (2013).

Though code-switching is not a perfect term, as it has become associated with languages as bounded rather than porous dynamic entities, and with deficiency minded, monolingual pedagogies (Canagarajah 2013, Ortega 2014, Faltis 2020, Valdés 2020), I think it is still a useful term as it is understood by most in the language education field. However, its meaning changes significantly when viewed through the lens of translanguaging, bringing it in line with what García and Wei (2014) call *flexible languaging* (p. 59) or what Canagarajah’s (2013) *codemeshing*. Instead of forcing students to use only the ‘target language’, classroom spaces contact zones where students can use all of their available linguistic resources to communicate their ideas and demonstrate their true intellect. This means that we throw out the whole idea of target language and L1/2 in favor of a holistic view of students and their language abilities or multicompetence (Cook & Wei, 2016). As García (2013) points out, “The common assumption that only the “target” language was to be used in language education programs, and of strict language separation, has become increasingly questioned as globalization has encouraged movement of people and information, shifting our conceptions of language...” (p. 59). Under this translingual view of code-switching, people are viewed as individual meaning makers who can use everything at their linguistic disposal to negotiate and create.

Does this mean that we allow students to never develop their competencies in the “target” language? Certainly not. Rather, we, as bilingual educators, are to recognize and utilize all of our students' linguistic competencies. It means that no language is forbidden, rather “L1’s” are to be

leveraged to assist students in both “target” language learning and content learning. Faltis (2020) gives multiple examples and even a cue system for when teachers and students can signify that they want to use code-switching to support learning (p. 48-49). Likewise, this applies to supposed monolingual speaking English students that come from a “non-standard” English background such as AAVE or a regional dialect in the English classroom. Instead of being told that they are wrong and speak bad English, it falls on the educator to recognize their linguistic backgrounds and educate the students on our semi-diglossic situation in the U.S. that goes unrecognized by society at large. It would empower students and help them to overcome the visible, but unspoken, barriers to employment, political participation, and social mobility.

Another helpful heuristic lens through which we can view language attitudes within and between contact zones is that of the dichotomy between what M.A.K. Halliday (2002) called glossodiversity and semiodiversity. Glossodiversity is a diversity of codes, or of named, separate, and countable languages (or dialects), whereas semiodiversity refers to a diversity of meaning. A good example of glossodiversity is the E.U. and its focus on plurilingualism. Under glossodiversity, individual, named languages are tolerated and even celebrated as long they adhere to the larger plan of translatability, transposability, and countability. That is, if they can easily be translated and have rigid boundaries with strict lexical meanings so as to be a countable individual unit; a standardized language. This is what is usually referred to as multilingualism in the US context. On an extreme end, this effort can lead to linguistic purism and institutions such as l'académie française work day and night to extricate “foreign words” like *hamburger* from the pure French lexicon. One way to think about glossodiversity is to look at languages in the various school systems around the world. In the typical Spanish (or other language) class in American high schools, languages tend to be represented as static, de-contextualized things that

we can study in books and that should be kept separate from our English. This can also be referred to as *strict languaging* (García and Wei, 2014).

Semiodiversity, on the other hand, represents those elements of language which cannot be easily translated, counted, or bounded. This concept draws attention to how language is lived, used, and changed in daily life, rather than standardized in books by governments.

Semiodiversity respects the fluidity and semi-permeable boundaries of languages. As David Gramling (2018) points out, “the disorderly phenomena of semiodiversity...make systematic, immediate translation of values, standards, terms, and even apparent cognates more unwieldy than at first glance.” (Gramling, p. 35). Take, for example, the phrase *I love you*. If we use a translation machine to translate it to Spanish, we might get the result of *te amo*. Many Spanish-speakers would never say *te amo* to their parents, friends, or family because *amar* carries a meaning of romantic love. In many Spanish-speaking countries friends and family use *te quiero* (literally, I want you) to express a platonic or familial love. This also varies between countries and regions in the Spanish-speaking world. Some places even do away with *amar* altogether. Imagine the potential scenarios of horror of mistranslation and cultural misunderstanding! Semiodiversity takes these differences in meaning in their respective contexts and ecology (Gramling, 2018). This is often an ignored and pushed aside aspect of language, including within named languages, and especially in the classroom. In a classroom where the teacher speaks “standard” English and the students speak various “dialects” or “un(sub)standard” English such as AAVE, as I pointed out above, there is a greater potential for conflict because teachers often respect glossodiversity, but not semiodiversity (think double negatives, the unconjugated or absent “be” verb in present continuous, etc.) .

If we look at the classroom as a type of contact zone we can see that multilingual students use the process of flexible languaging (or semiodiversity) to make meaning in the classroom and successful teachers are those that are able to recognize this and harness it to enhance learning (Blackledge and Creese 2010, de Jong 2011, Canagarajah 2013, García and Wei 2014, Guzula, McKinney, and Robyn Tyler 2016). I think if studies were conducted on monolingual speakers in similar situation, we would find that they too would learn better if their linguistic identity and idiolect were respected in the classroom. As evidenced by the few observations that I referenced above, I have witnessed situations where monolinguals have sometimes successfully, but often unsuccessfully attempted code-switching under their own impetus. I will submit myself as a case study for what happens when a monolingual English speaker begins to use flexible languaging/codeswitching intuitively after failures and many linguistic misunderstandings.

I grew up in rural Northern New England along the banks of the Connecticut River in a working-class family. This region of New England has its own peculiar dialect that straddles both Vermont and New Hampshire in the New England dialect continuum. The dialects of English here are determined more by economic class than anything else. Those in the working and lower middle classes have traditionally “thick” accents while the middle and upper classes speak a more standard, educated English (this division is exacerbated by recent influxes of college educated, middle-class migrants from other Northeastern states) . My speech was filled with front-loaded vowels (ce-ow/cow), dropped middle or end consonants (winer/winter), and an ‘r’ that I have trouble finding on the IPA chart. For the most part I was raised monolingual except for the bits of French I picked up from my maternal grandparents’ families. Words like *biscuit* and *creton* stayed with me as well as children’s songs like *Frere Jaques*. My maternal grandfather was a victim of Americanization during the 50’s and 60’s when he emigrated to the

U.S. from Quebec, so he decided that we “were gonna talk English and be American”. The paternal side of my family were and still are monolingual English speakers of Irish-Catholic stock. While foreign languages weren't disparaged, they weren't encouraged either, it wasn't a factor in our lives. I took Spanish in high school and although I enjoyed it, I never thought myself a Spanish speaker or bilingual.

When I began my college career I moved to Idaho and attended the University of Idaho for two years before deciding to return. During that time, I realized that I couldn't communicate effectively in my classes as I had never really learned academic English well enough to speak in a college level course. Not only that, my accent was a point of ridicule by my friends and peers who begged me to say certain words (especially those with post-vocalic r's) so they could get entertainment from it. On top of that, working class Idahoans also have a dialect with different features than my own with long nasalized a's and o's leading to several misunderstandings in both my classes and peer groups. I remember my statistics professor asking me to “maysure” something five times before I finally understood that she wanted me to *measure* something (for me the ea is a schwa). I started to flatten and standardize my speech. I paid extremely close attention to those who “spoke well” and little by little I was able to code-switch into “academic” me.

I returned to New England after two years “abroad” and found that I had culture shock and was finally able to understand my own linguistic heritage. During the course of my history undergraduate degree, I had to take several foreign language courses, of which German really piqued my interest. I had an excellent professor and for the first time I fell in love with a language. I did well in my courses I think because I had developed a code-switching ability and was used to changing my personality and language to fit the situation. Since then, I have fallen in

love with other languages and developed a German, Spanish, and French me. When I took a job teaching ESL to Spanish-speakers, I scrambled to learn as much Spanish as possible to better serve them. I now teach in a very bilingual manner using more or less Spanish depending on the language proficiencies of my students. I also have incorporated different languages and cultures into my daily life. Texting friends in German, listening to Spanish pop music, and cooking traditional *Quebecois* dishes for dinner are all normal parts of my life as well as slipping into my native dialect when speaking with fellow working-class Vermonters.

The point of this mini-autoethnography (Canagarajah 2013) is not to self-aggrandize, but to illustrate that supposed monolinguals and bilinguals navigate contact zones using their unique linguistic repertoires. Perhaps if I had been raised in an upper middle-class family, I would have spoken standard English at home, and I would have been able to make the transition to college life more easily. But because I didn't, I had to learn the art of code-switching and navigating contact zones. I also wanted, likewise, to show the various motivations that people have to code-switch. Whether it comes from outside influences, such as ridicule, misunderstanding locals, or Americanization, or from inside influences, such as curiosity, a desire to help/teach, or social mobility, almost all people who are not born into the prestigious classes need to have this ability to survive and thrive. In order to serve our students more effectively and justly we need to understand not only the linguistic, but also the socio-economic and cultural backgrounds of them and their families. Doing so will give teachers a greater ability to connect with students and make them feel that their identities are respected and affirmed. What, then, can I as an educator do with stories like mine to make the classroom a safe place for students to translanguage and explore their emerging new identities? What can I do in my daily life to make myself for "translingual" and therefore make myself more understandable to those in my community? What

can we do as educators to begin to change this “sacred deficiency” that is so pervasive in Anglo-American monolingual culture? I think a translingual perspective can help.

Translingual Practices for the Classroom and Daily Life



Convergence by Jackson Pollock (<https://www.jackson-pollock.org/convergence.jsp>)

The change from monolingual to a translingual pedagogy should begin first with a change in our perspective and theoretical framework in the classroom. As translanguaging sees each individual as having a unique linguistic repertoire than can be added to, we need to change our assumptions to reflect that. This means that each student and their idiolect needs to be respected and affirmed (de Jong 2011, 174). They each represent a life of linguistic growth and identity. Scholars are beginning to see that even in monolingual ideological run classrooms that translingual practices are being implemented (see Paulsrud and Rosen 2019, p.5). This frees teachers and students to view their meaning-making capacities on an individual and local level rather than tied to a state or government. Speaking in the context of bilingual learners, Garcia

and Lin point out, “... by taking the perspective of the individual speaker, and not that of the state, bilingual users are freed from the strictures that keep us from understanding each other and from discovering the common features in our language repertoire and those held by others.” (Garcia and Lin 2016, p. 11). What we need also is, as Canagarajah points out, a fundamental change in our perception of what a “language” is and where meaning resides (Canagarajah 2013, p. 40). Adopting this new concept, that is socially constructed/negotiated on a local level rather than inherent in a language, will also allow us to move away from correct language=correct meaning thinking. When speaking about translingual practices in his native Sri Lanka Canagarajah states, “...the interlocutors negotiate their differences to construct norms that work for them in a locally situated manner, in their particular conversation. These are intersubjective norms; they are co-constructed.” (Canagarajah 2013, 41).

We must also align our practices with a translingual perspective. This means that we must lay bare the socio-linguistic reality that we live in to our students. They need to be aware of the sometimes-hidden power dynamics that are taking place in their communities and know how to negotiate meaning with others who might come from a different socio-linguistic background. This means explicit instruction of how Standard English (whether British or American) works and how it differs from their local variety or native language. They ought to be made aware that there is nothing wrong with their variety of English or language and that knowledge and use of the standard variety can help them to negotiate with other speakers of English and advocate for their needs. They should also be made aware of the actual merits of having and learning a standard variety of a language and how it can give disparate peoples a voice and political power, increasing their own abilities to negotiate. Canagarajah puts it in a list like this:

- Start from your personality (locality);

- Negotiate on equal terms;
- Focus on practices, not form;
- Co-construct the rules and terms of engagement;
- Be responsive to joint accomplishment of goals;
- Reconfigure your norms and expand your repertoire. (Canagarajah 2013, p. 175)

Several prominent members of the translingual movement have added to this model. In response to monolingual instruction Lourdes Ortega has pointed out several fallacies in traditional pedagogy. One which needs to be addressed is what she has called the comparative fallacy of using the idealized native speaker as the model/benchmark for language acquisition and development (Ortega 2014, p. 34). Part of the problem is how we categorize speakers of English into *Native* and *Nonnative* speakers. The word native implies someone who learned English as a birthright and has had a lifelong monolingual development without the stain of other languages (linguistic purity), whereas nonnative implies the opposite (Ortega, p. 35). Words that often get associated with native speakers are “authentic”, “pure”, and “fluent”. “Broken”, “bad”, or “mixed” are often used as words to describe non-native speakers (Ortega 2014). Part of the problem with the native speaker model is that it is an idealized version of English that contains supposed prestige features which almost no speaker adheres to in reality. English is also increasingly a world language with several centers of standardization such as Singapore, India, and Nigeria. It is no longer only a question of American or British English, English is an extremely diverse and ever-transforming language. We need to change our view of English to include this diversity. According to Canagarajah

we must develop an orientation to English as having been already always diverse. It hasn't become translingual or hybrid only because of its flows outside its traditional homeland or native speaker communities. Native speaker communities also engage in translingual practices. Not surprisingly, the dominant models of global Englishes leave out native speakers and their communities from their analyses (p. 57).

Therefore, the idea of the native speaker is inherently flawed as the diversity of English makes it impossible to even conceptualize a singular variety of English as the “legitimate” one. “Native speakerhood, too, is eventually an ideological position, as it helps define all those who don’t belong to that community as nonnative, with their use defined as illegitimate.”(Canagarajah 2014, p. 80). Native speakerhood delegitimizes nonnative speakers and can create the idea of language ownership, which in a world language like English is untenable.

For us language educators, we need to stop assessing our students based on the native/nonnative dichotomy. Several frameworks for assessment have been proposed in its stead such as Canagarajah’s *Performative Competence* (2013) in which he proposes that students be assessed on their ability to negotiate meaning dialogically.

translinguals don’t assume that their meanings and objectives for the communicative interaction will be unconditionally accomplished. They are open to hybrid, qualified, and negotiated outcomes. This orientation makes interaction truly dialogical. In this manner, there is an opportunity for both parties to gain from the contribution of the other. Thus translinguals are able to connect learning with use in the language interactions (Canagarajah 2013, p. 176).

In practical terms this means that instead of setting up a “target” that must be reached for a student to be considered competent, we judge the performance on how competent they were at creating and negotiating meaning with others. Perhaps the student forgot that the adjective comes before the noun in English, but if they were able to co-create meaning with others this syntactic detail is of lesser value. This is not to say that we should forget about grammar and syntax, it is still very important! But when assessing students in the moment it is more important that they are competent in meaning-making, the rest can be developed later. This means that the Form/Meaning/Use paradigm would shift to Meaning/Use/ and then Form in importance, not that the order of acquisition is important, but rather which parts are most important for competency.

Tatyana Kleyn and Ofelia García have proposed several lessons and guideline for educators setting up and assessing translingual classrooms (García and Kleyn 2016). This includes allowing students to use their whole linguistic repertoire in assessment situations. “Allow students to be evaluated using their full linguistic repertoire, especially if the goal is to assess content learning rather than a given language. Many of the case studies show how teachers accept all students’ answers if they show comprehension, reflection, and thought.” (Kleyn 2016, p. 206). According to Kleyn, when possible, teachers should allow students to use translations, allow them to answer in any language they feel comfortable with, use culturally relevant materials, allow students with common languages to collaborate and help each other with translation and language production, and have students produce translanguaged projects to show the school community that the classroom has space for all languages. (Kleyn, p. 207-8). These strategies should naturally extend to non-standard English speakers as well. It could go a long way in easing American language anxiety and help students to understand the diversity and beauty of the English they use. All students should have the opportunity to learn about and incorporate any linguistic feature that they use and want to use.

Something we need to incorporate into our practice that I have alluded to is identity affirmation of our students. This means that we as educators take the time to know our students and their various backgrounds and contexts and adapt our teaching to them. The Principle of Affirming Identities is something de Jong describes as, “...derived from the basic learning principle that engagement in and motivation for learning is facilitated when students feel validated for and can build on what they know. When students’ developing sense of self is affirmed and extended through their interactions with teachers, they are more likely to apply themselves academically and participate actively in instruction.” (de Jong 2011, p.175). This is

in contrast to the “color-blind” approach of supposed equal opportunity pedagogy. Under this principle we recognize and highlight differences to show students that their differences are respected and valued. “Applying this principle at the classroom level, teachers could examine whether and how their students have opportunities to represent and explore multiple identities and how their practices include their students’ lived experiences in meaningful ways.” (de Jong, p. 176). We should engage students with assignments in which they can share their identities with other and explore different identities of classmates and beyond. Blackledge and Creese (2010) have called this process *co-creation of identity* as teachers and students are active in the process of identity creation and exploration in the classroom. This begins with teachers allowing students the freedom to construct their own identities and world views. (p. 143). To facilitate this process, they “propose explicit discussion with students of different social languages and the imposed hierarchy of social languages on society.” (p. 143).

Exercises to accomplish the goals of identity affirmation and co-creation of identity could include different role-play situations in which students are allowed to incorporate elements of their home culture and language such as a holiday or festival or different interviews in which students explore different social languages such as with a famous person versus a night out with friends. This sort of identity sharing and roleplay need not be confined to just speaking and listening as reading and writing are crucial to helping students develop both voice and identity. Language diaries and translation notebooks can help students to develop their written identities, while personal narratives and novels can help students to enter into different identities. One could even conceive of an activity in which students read several diary entries by several people involved in an event and after they have to write their own diary entry reflecting both their identity and that which they are creating. Students could also roleplay these characters in a live

performance as yet another way for them to practice their performative competence and to try out the identities they have created. This can help students practice for the various contact zones that they will have to navigate in their in their daily lives inside and outside of the classroom. The concept of the porous classroom (Breen, 1999) invites us to take things further increasing the engagement of the students with various communities (on & off line) with their particular sets of language repertoires and modality preferences.

Teachers should not only embrace but also participate in such these processes and activities as well. Though seemingly obvious to many of us that translangual practices should be adopted, some educators still maintain that their classrooms are English-only classrooms that adhere to Anglo-American cultural standards and their ideas form the basis of our ESL curriculum. Thus, teachers need to be willing and able to take on several different roles such as facilitators, teacher-learners, guides, and models. They need to recognize that they have valuable things to learn from their students and that translanguaging is a pedagogy of practicality, of whatever works.

the teacher who uses translanguaging gives up her authority role in the classroom. Rather than teachers, they become facilitators, able to set up the project-based instruction and collaborative groupings that maximize interactions that would maximize translanguaging to learn. The teacher sets up the affordances for students to engage in discursive and semiotic practices that respond to their cognitive and social intentions. Translanguaging in teaching is always used in the service of providing rigorous instruction and maximizing-making repertoires, including practices that fall under ‘academic language’. Translanguaging has ‘pedagogic value’, since it is used ‘both as part of teachers’ linguistic toolkit for academic content learning and to valorize and promote pride in students’ ethnolinguistic identities. (García and Wei 2014, p. 93).

ESL/EFL teachers do not need to be able to hold a conversation in the language of each of their students in order to accomplish this, though it is imperative that the teacher learn

about the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of each student. Teachers should share their own backgrounds with the students as well so the students know that their teacher is like them with their own unique background. As García and Wei suggest above, teachers need to create affordances wherever possible in the classroom. This can be as simple as multilingual, multimodal posters or a word of the day with all languages in the class represented. Larger projects such as a family tree or family photo album with all the languages and cultures of students' families included. Teachers need to give students opportunities to share their languages and cultures as well by taking on the role of authority and teaching some of their language and culture to the rest of the class as well as the teacher. Students can make videos using social media, show memes, bring in written materials, or offer traditional lectures on their languages and cultures. Once the words, phrases, and/or customs have been taught, they should be incorporated into daily classroom life. One such instance happened in my classroom when we had a Japanese-speaking student teach us the word *okashi*, snack. Since then all students and teachers have incorporated the word into our common idiolect using it in a variety of ways (multimodal). By committing to such translingual practices teachers are doing much more important than teaching a 'target' language, they are affirming identities and creating a space for flexible languaging (semiodiversity) to happen with their students.

Finally, as part of a teacher's theoretical framework, I propose that, what Wang and Mansouri (after Freire) have called a 'critical pedagogy', be incorporated. A critical pedagogy is one which,

consider[s] language to be an embodiment of discourses and ideologies that are heavily engaged with power dynamics. Such an approach to ELT moves...schooling towards a democratic educational view in which teachers and

students problematize the taken-for-granted knowledge of what should be their medium of instruction and examine the sociopolitical implications of code-switching practice. (Wang and Mansouri 2017, p. 410).

As students are learning language to navigate the different contact zones that they will encounter in their lives, they need to be aware of the different power structures and potential conflicts imbedded in these contact zones. A large part of navigating a contact zone is how to code-switch in order to both give oneself voice and agency as well as to potentially avoid or lessen undesired conflicts. This means, like the roleplay activities mentioned before, that we as educators need to teach the different dimensions of language such as register, formality, accent, dialect, et cetera and allow our students to practice moving between these different zones. Such examples could be: formal/informal, rural/urban, dominant/minority culture, age, workplace, discriminated speech and many more. These are things that successful monolinguals have learned automatically by virtue of being born in a certain place and culture but must be taught explicitly to our students who did not have that luxury. Critical pedagogy is also designed to give students the ability to interpret and objectify the hegemonic culture or language that they might find themselves in and to be able to question existing structures and practices, or what we might call critical thinking skills.

The relevance of Critical Pedagogy in codeswitching thus lies in its capability to produce counternarratives that disturb the hegemonic narratives of English language as a homogenizing tool. The use of counter discourse in this case helps learners negotiate with "the historical and socially constructed identity of learners [which] influences the subject position they take up in the language classroom (Wang and Mansouri, p. 410).

Giving students this reflective ability to look at and identify power structures of language and society is crucial for students to be able to navigate daily life in various contact zones. They can also analyze and be critical of their teachers and schools, pointing out discriminatory practices or

suggest adjustments to teachers' pedagogies. For the teacher this means that we need to teach about the socio-linguistic reality and history students are living in. Topics such as the actual linguistic diversity and rich linguistic history of the U.S., colonization and its effect on language and culture, and about the standardization and curricularization of language need to be made comprehensible and are imperative to this process. Questions such as "why do we speak English here?" or "why do we assume that the U.S. is only English-speaking when we have more than 50 million Spanish speakers?" could serve as good starting points for discussions, lessons, or whole units. All students deserve to have the ability to problematize and think critically about the systems of power around them. It is fundamental to democracy and to global citizenship.

Despite what generations of students have thought, teachers are real people with personal lives and extracurricular interests. Teachers are people too! But we do not need to 'turn off' our translingual practices when we leave the classroom. What are some ways that we can incorporate translingual practices into our daily lives? As translinguaging is a theory that goes beyond (trans) just named languages and includes all modalities of communication, there is truly no limit. Most research has been on translinguaging in education, so to conclude, I want to offer a few ways in which I think we can use translinguaging to traverse the contact zones of daily life.

Translinguaging is above all a dialogical framework for meaning making. When we engage others in conversation, we are constantly assessing and re-assessing how we are languaging with them and they with us. What we need to be aware of in this process is that meaning making process and not necessarily the 'grammaticality' of what is being said. If someone at the store is short a few dollars and says, "I ain't got no more money!" you should not judge that speech as 'uneducated' or 'substandard', rather, you should give them some money and wish them a good day. Even if you did give them the money, but 'corrected' their speech

they would remember that instead of your act of kindness as speech is so tied to identity it would be as if you were attacking them personally instead of their speech. I am not suggesting language teachers do this all the time, but most of us have a voice in our heads constantly analyzing and correcting others' speech. While this is part of being a teacher, we need to remember that outside of the classroom in different contact zones we are encountering the various socio-linguistic power dynamics at play in real time. Instead, we should ask ourselves 'why' they used language in that way and try to understand their language usage so we can better engage in the dialogical meaning making process (Bakhtin 2017). We should be aware of our own biases and try not to language profile.

Similarly, we need to give ourselves a break in our own language usage. If we realize that standard, named languages are socially constructed, we can free ourselves to play and explore with our own idiolects. Like our students in class, we must be allowed to try on new and different identities to allow ourselves to develop. For us North American English users it can be something as simple as trying out 'y'all' instead of 'you guys' or allowing yourself to speak your regional dialect without shame. This does not give us permission to transgress social and cultural boundaries, however. Part of the art of traversing contact zones and translanguaging is that you always have to be willing to stretch and play with your linguistic identity without getting your meaning misconstrued as mocking or offensive. Always be willing to test your performative competence.

One need not 'speak' another language to engage in translanguaging with speakers of other languages (though learning languages is fun!). If there are people in your life that you see regularly that speak another language, putting in the effort to learn a few words or phrases (or how to pronounce their names correctly) can show that you respect and affirm their identity just

as in the classroom. They have taken the time to learn your codes of meaning-making (language) so giving some effort in return shows your desire for reciprocity. For those of us who are multilingual, there are so many ways we can use and develop our linguistic repertoires on a daily basis that aren't "work" – reading, listening to music, and watching TV in all the languages you have interest in. Consider seeking out language partners to do fun activities with like cooking or watching sports. Put up posters, pictures, and signs in your house in various languages. Change your electronic devices to a different language setting. And most importantly, don't be afraid of 'mixing' languages! Use all of your resources in meaning making. If you forget a word in English but remember it in Spanish or if the situation fits a German phrase instead of Japanese one, then use it. These suggestions are not meant to be paternalistic or prescriptive, but rather, these are practices that have been effective for me and others I know.

Translanguaging is about breaking down the hegemonic monolingual power systems that have colonized our minds and have attempted to shackle our creative unified languaging ability to artificial state-mandated 'languages'. It opens up almost limitless possible avenues of new inquiry and re-evaluation of existing structures and concepts. By multiple, incremental acts we can change the linguistic narratives that we have been living under for so long and rediscover our inherent meaning-making language capacities, while making our society linguistically more inclusive, just and free. On the individual level, it is about who we are and who we can become. Discover, Learn, and Grow.

Questions for Further Research:

Can one create specific translingual curricula, units and lessons or is translanguaging primarily a matter of a different habit of mind that validates, encourages and facilitates the full use of one's semiotic repertoire?

How are teachers using translanguaging in daily life outside the classroom?

Do students who are taught using translingual pedagogies view themselves and their identities differently from those who are taught using a monolingual pedagogy?

There are manifold ways that one could explore the application of translanguaging. It encompasses any and all language phenomena. Many researchers, teachers, and thinkers have begun the process of implementing translingual practices into the classroom, but much more work has to be done. It would be a boon for other fields and disciplines to critically analyze their respective theoretical frameworks and look a new through the translingual lens. Seemingly disparate fields such as criminal justice or civil engineering could aid in creating a more linguistically just society.

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